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ABSTRACT

This paper presents principles for inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, organized around the following aspects: inclusion versus mainstreaming, service delivery, planning and curriculum development, best practices, and training. Among the principles discussed are: students are members of age-appropriate general education classrooms; students move with peers to subsequent grades; disability type or severity does not preclude involvement in inclusive classrooms; the staff-to-student ratio for itinerant special education teachers is equivalent to that in a special class; special education students are considered a part of the total class count for class size purposes; there is coordination with school restructuring at the district and site level and commitment to inclusion by the school administration; there is close collaboration between special and general education teachers; supplemental instructional services are provided through a transdisciplinary team approach; regularly scheduled collaborative planning meetings are held with all concerned; transition planning is engaged in at all levels; effective instructional practices are supported; general ability awareness training is provided to staff, students, and parents; and adequate training and staff development are provided. (Contains 37 references.) (DB)

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ED 393 248

What is "Inclusion"?

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"They told me if I wanted my son fully included, he would have to show he could be in regular class independently. I know he's going to have trouble with all the work in that class, but I want him to be around people his own age who talk and play games and act like kids. Right now he's in his regular class, but he doesn't have anyone helping him. The teacher is trying, but I can see she's frustrated. Isn't he supposed to have some kind of special education help?"

"I really believe in inclusion and I'm trying to make it work as an itinerant teacher, but I have to cover eight schools with ten students. I'm not getting to see them much or their classroom teachers, much less actually work with them, and I have to rely on my instructional assistants. I'm afraid that if we have any serious behavior problems, the response will be to move the student back to special class."

There are a lot of things done in the name of inclusion, and these two vignettes illustrate situations that occur far too often nationwide. Because inclusion is so often misunderstood, it is also mistrusted and confused with putting students with special needs into general education classrooms with no support; mainstreaming students who are "ready" for part of the day; or creating situations in which special education teachers can only be consultants because of the number of students and schools they must cover. These practices operating under the name "inclusion" or "full inclusion" are

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destined to fail because the necessary supports and planning are not formalized or even addressed.

Our history of services for students with severe disabilities reflects separation and segregation from other students without disabilities. In recent years, through the advocacy of parents and educators, and the successes of students who have been included in general education and community settings, increasing numbers of students are being included as members of general education classes. This change is not without difficulty and probably the primary challenge in change is in attitude. A number of educators and parents inside and outside special education have some difficulty understanding why including students is beneficial, and how students' individual needs will be met. It is incumbent upon those of us supporting this shift to inclusive education to demonstrate to families and staff that not only can students of diverse abilities learn together, but that specific student needs will be met. In doing so we will ensure that the powerful instructional strategies developed over time in special education are utilized in inclusive general education classes. This merger of powerful special education practices with best practices in general education defines *inclusive education*.

INCLUSION VS. MAINSTREAMING

Students are members of chronologically age-appropriate general education classrooms in their normal schools of attendance, or in magnet schools or schools of choice when these options exist for students without disabilities.

The single most identifiable characteristic of inclusive education is membership. Students who happen to have disabilities are seen first as kids who are a natural part of the school site and the age-appropriate general education classroom they attend. This is quite different from the more typical practice of mainstreaming in which students are members of a special classroom and periodically visit the general education classroom for instruction. The distinction is critical and presented in quite a compelling manner in Schnorr's 1990 article about first graders' perspectives on a part-time "mainstream student". Students speaking about belonging referred to the student being mainstreamed as not being in their class, "Sometimes he's in this class and the other time he goes down to his room --his class in room 10" (p. 235 Schnorr, 1990). Similarly, general education teachers receiving a mainstreamed student commonly see this student as belonging to another class and too often, the responsibility of another teacher. The transitions expected of students with special needs in terms of coming in and out of the general education classrooms are taxing. In the recent U.S. Court of Appeals case, Sacramento City USD v. Holland, the district proposed a plan in which the student would transition six times a day, in early primary grades! [14F.3d 1398 (1994)]

"Home schools" are not always the neighborhood school down the street. When a district has magnet or alternative schools which offer a focus such as the arts, or the sciences, those options must be available to students with disabilities. Magnet schools may provide instruction in more active, thematic approaches and for many students with disabilities, these practices may be the best approach (Hunt, Staub, Alwell & Goetz, 1994).

When students are members of age-appropriate general education classrooms in their normal schools of attendance, we also avoid the inappropriate placement of too many students who have IEPs at a particular school, and instead mirror the natural proportion of students with disabilities in our communities.

Students move with peers to subsequent grades in school.

The best environments for learning are those in which students are motivated, learning is active and information is presented in a manner that recognizes the diversity of each student. The outcomes expected for students at each grade level related to achievement of the core curriculum may not be possible for all included students, particularly those whose learning difficulties result from cognitive, motor, sensory or communication disabilities. Many of these students will not maintain pace with their peers without disabilities, particularly in the academic areas. To use the achievement of district grade level outcomes set for students without disabilities, would require that many students continue working at particular grade level material and concepts for many years. This contrasts with best practices in educational programs for students with severe disabilities where

involvement in chronologically age-appropriate environments and activities has been identified as a key indicator. (Sailor, Anderson, Halvorsen, Filler, Doering & Goetz, 1989; Sailor, Gee & Karasoff, 1993; Simon, Karasoff & Smith, 1992).

To accomplish effective inclusion, the student's individual program (IEP) is addressed within the context of the curriculum through a matricing process that is discussed later in this article. In this way, the student's IEP is used to guide adaptations as well as direct instruction that will be supported in the general education class. Students benefit from the role models their peers provide. These appropriate role models provide not only the opportunity to learn how to behave in situations, but also allow for an increasing number of shared, real-life experiences with others the same age. For example, when students who are reading about Romeo and Juliet in literature class discuss the story at lunch or make references to it, the student with special needs will gain an understanding of the context of the conversation, and of the play being about teenage romance and relationships. As a special class student joining these peers only for lunch, she would have no such common experience or shared understanding. These experiences are critical steps in the development of those skills that lead to full participation in the community as a valued member and without them, students fall farther and farther behind their peers.

The development of friendships and social connections typically have their basis in shared history. Students who have had the same experiences have something to converse about. Their involvement in the same activities allows for a common bond. As students move from grade to grade or from

school to school, having friends who move with them is one way to make the transition more comfortable. For students with disabilities, who may have a number of challenges already, having a social network to support them is extremely important to their success. This support network brings background and insight to the people in the next setting, assisting them in getting to know this person so that there are fewer misunderstandings and more success.

No special class exists except as a place for enrichment activities for all students.

Membership's importance cannot be overestimated. Successful inclusive education is difficult if a student is already seen as a member of a special education class. In many school situations, students who receive special education services are seen and referred to as "special education students" and when students qualify for special education services they are "sent to special education" as if it were a place. The problem with the special classroom is not in regard to students needing individualized instruction in a quieter or more structured setting, it is in the belief that they need to go somewhere else to receive it. In addition, it is in the belief and practice that only those students who qualify for special education need this type of instruction. We need to remind ourselves that even though the federal government has limited identification of students receiving special education services to 12%, this doesn't mean that only 12% of the students in a given school need or would benefit from more support. When special educators are

an ongoing presence in our general education classrooms, more of this support can be provided for all students (Henderson, 1995).

A second concern with the special classroom is with the fact that if it is available, it will be used. When a student is having difficulty with the curriculum or in behaving appropriately in class, the most likely solution will be to send the student to the special class. In almost every case, this is not the best solution. Rather than address the reasons the student might be failing in the lesson, which might be in terms of how it is presented, the material itself, specific requirements of the lesson; and modifying in these areas, teaching staff often reach for the first strategy that comes to mind: send him to the special class until he is "ready." The strategies utilized in special classrooms are not appreciably different from good teaching strategies utilized in general education. A case might be made that the strategies can be more focused in a smaller setting, but this is an issue of how support is provided, rather than where that occurs.

Disability type or severity of disability does not preclude involvement in inclusive classrooms

Many times, school districts that are working to include students with disabilities take the approach that in order to be successful, it makes sense to start with those who are "most capable" or those who are "most like" the typical general education student. Educators seek to ease fears about inclusion by starting with those students who we think will make the smoothest transition and will not be "noticed as much." In our view, this is a mistake, because it delays the issue, and avoids the real basis for inclusive schools; a

belief in the capacity for all students to learn and contribute. There are many illustrative examples of the problems with the former approach. In the 1980's, as special schools began to move students back to general education school sites, many started with the students with the most skills. This did not lessen the fears or concerns in most cases and in fact, made each subsequent move of students (who happened to have fewer skills) more difficult. Each transition meant starting over. Those programs that have most successfully included students have taken a *zero rejection* approach Baumgart, Brown, Pumpian, Nisbet, Ford, Sweet, Messina & Schroeder, 1982). If the school believes in inclusive education, it believes in including all students, not just those who are considered "ready". This is another critical difference between mainstreaming and inclusive education. Mainstreaming has typically meant that students had to be able to perform in the general education class with little or no additional support. Inclusion means providing the student with the support necessary to participate and to learn.

The categorical approach fostered by special education has also created a number of problems. There are classes for students with autism, for those with physical disabilities, vision and hearing challenges, cognitive disabilities, social-emotional problems, which by their homogeneous nature serve to support the view of individual students as part of a group that requires a certain approach in learning. The strategies that have been found to be of value in supporting learning for a particular student can be useful to many students. Rather than place students based upon their label or the severity of their disability, inclusive schools serve all students regardless of the type or severity of disability by ensuring that the expertise and support they need is placed with them. For example, in two rural districts we know, all

elementary age students with disabilities are supported in their general education classes by special education teachers and part-time paraprofessionals. The support teacher's caseload is non categorical, and the special education staff presence in these classes has led to decreased referrals in one school, and to team-teaching with the result of added resources for general education students in both schools.

SERVICE DELIVERY

The staff to student ratio for an itinerant special education teacher is equivalent to the special class ratio and aide support is at least the level it would be in a special class.

One of the most often heard concerns regarding inclusive education is that there will be insufficient support for students with special needs in the general education classroom. General education teachers will be required to spend an inordinate amount of time with students who have special needs. This perception has led to negative reactions from teachers' bargaining units such as American Federation of Teachers which called for a moratorium on inclusion until we "know how to do it right." (Shanker, 1994).

It is important to consider the typical level of support currently provided in special classrooms. For example in California, with current funding levels, the special class unit provides one credentialled special education teacher and 1.05 instructional assistants for an average of ten students. School districts often increase the support to two instructional assistants per special class when the class involves students with severe disabilities. Of course, the IEP may require additional support for individual students. When students are mainstreamed, the special education teacher must carefully manage a small pool of support resources across those mainstream classes while continuing to operate the special classroom. Within the special classroom, it is also important to acknowledge that all students do not work on the same level or even on the same objectives. Staff typically work either individually or with

small groups in the classroom. This is important information in terms of the belief that when students are sent to the special classroom, they receive more intensive services. Every student with special needs does not have one-to-one instruction and that level of support may not be available or desirable when they are included.

A benefit of inclusive education in regard to in-class support is that staff do not need to maintain a special class while supporting students in their general education classrooms. The limited support available can be focused on actual in-class support. The challenge for staff is to ensure that the limited support is used to the best advantage. One strategy teachers have used is to meet as a group involving all general education cooperating teachers and the special education inclusion teacher to determine how the available support will be allocated. Specific times when staff assistance is required are identified and the whole group works collaboratively to set the support schedule. This approach avoids the situation common in many schools in which the special education teacher is expected to allocate support, usually to no one's satisfaction. In an era when competition for resources in education is high, the use of instructional assistants must be carefully considered. Involving those general educators and administrators directly impacted in the allocation of these resources creates an environment more conducive to understanding the demands on both general and special education.

It is extremely important to acknowledge that inclusive education does not mean placing students in general education classrooms without support. It is also important to note that it does not mean that every student is attended by a "personal aide." At least the same level of support provided these students in the special education classroom should be provided in inclusive settings.

There is always a certificated employee (special education teacher, resource specialist/other) assigned to supervise and assist any classified staff (eg. paraprofessional) working with specific students in general education classrooms.

Many school districts that are taking a piecemeal approach to inclusion are either placing students in general education classrooms without support, or hiring an instructional assistant to work with the student in the classroom under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Students who qualify for special education services, particularly those with severe disabilities, require staff trained in their instructional needs. In our estimation, there are very definite skills required of educators serving students with special needs and it is a grave mistake to ignore this. Special educators are trained in working with families, selecting goals and objectives, understanding the implications of particular disabilities and providing the instruction necessary to support students in learning the academic, communication, motor, social and cognitive skills necessary.

Successful inclusive programs ensure that there is always a qualified, credentialled special education teacher who supervises the paraprofessional staff in cooperation with the general education classroom teacher. This special education/inclusion teacher is responsible for overseeing: 1)IEP implementation; 2) the training of paraprofessional staff ensuring that instructional programs are implemented correctly; and 3) the effective communication and collaboration of all staff. As noted above, many school districts are reorganizing services district-wide, moving to a non-categorical

service approach. This approach may mean that teachers credentialled in the area of learning disabilities may also be responsible for serving students with severe disabilities. When special education teachers begin operating outside the area for which they have been specifically trained, (e.g. in a non-categorical approach), it is incumbent on administrators to ensure that they receive the specific ongoing training they require to serve students under their care. What is important to note is that students deserve qualified teachers and inclusive education does not preclude that right. Some districts have provided support for cross-categorical training by supporting teachers in completing additional credential work, releasing teachers from their duties to provide hands-on training to another teacher, or selecting inclusion mentor teachers with expertise in particular areas and releasing them for a designated number of days per year according to a carefully designed plan, so that they can then coach and support their peers. A non-categorical approach offers the potential for ensuring that students may be served in their home schools by avoiding the clustering of students with a particular label, and teachers may be able to provide support in just one school.

Special education students who are fully included are considered a part of the total class count for class size purposes. In other words, even when a student is not counted for general education average daily attendance (ADA), s/he is not an "extra" student above the contractual class size.

In California, when students are mainstreamed from a special class, they are not counted as a member of the general education class because they are already counted as a part of the special class count. For general education teachers, this is important because mainstreaming another student means

making accommodations in terms of space, materials, planning and attention. General education teachers who may be overwhelmed already by the numbers of students in their classrooms are not thrilled about receiving another student outside their contractual class size. In contrast, inclusive education by definition means that the student with special education needs is a full member of the general education classroom, counted as part of the class size. This ensures that general education classrooms that include students with special needs do not result in undue impact to that class..

When schools include students as members of general education classrooms for class size, and at the same time generate special education support through special class placement, there can be a negative fiscal impact to the district. Depending on average class size, including that number of students with special needs in the district can mean generating the need for additional classroom teachers. It is important that districts also analyze their expenses and savings in other areas, such as the reduced transportation costs that may result from inclusion. In addition, as students are included, special education classrooms for 10 students become available to general education classes of 30 students, thus saving on space acquisition and maintenance costs of several thousand annually (Halvorsen, Neary, Hunt & Piuma, 1995).

Supported education efforts are coordinated with school restructuring at the district and site level and a clear commitment to an inclusive option is demonstrated by the Board of Education and Superintendent.

With increasing pressure to examine their practices in light of what many perceive to be very disappointing outcomes, schools are initiating

restructuring of the way students learn and educators teach (Jorgensen, 1994; Roach, 1994; Sailor, 1991). These restructuring efforts hold great promise for re-examining our vision for education, the expectations we hold for students who are part of our schools, and the way we organize our learning environments in light of current variables.

In 1991, through a legislative initiative, California offered planning incentives for schools restructuring education. It was disappointing to find that very few of the proposals for these restructuring planning grants involved any mention of special education, and it is difficult to understand how a school could restructure without special education being addressed. Not only are 10-12% of the students in a district receiving special education services, but many of these students are involved in both general and special education programs and the coordination of the staff and students involved is an ongoing challenge. To be successful, any restructuring at the school site or district level must include all students. The resources that are categorically provided in many situations are not economically used and may be wasted. When schools coordinate resources based upon what students need they can use them to better advantage.

Finally, unless those in positions of influence and authority support inclusive education verbally and in their actions, there will continue to be ambivalence about implementing the changes necessary in our schools. At every level of the district, inclusive education impacts people and practices. The changes people will need to make are difficult and require support. There will be resistance and outright conflict in changing our schools that requires strong administrative leadership (Roach, 1992; 1994). This support

need not be dictatorial or top-down. Rather, in successful districts, superintendents have charged their administrators with forming representative cross-constituency Inclusion Task Forces to develop proposed policies for administrative and Board review, and to formulate training plans as well as recommendations for procedures that will support effective inclusion. These districts have provided released time to support initial and ongoing training needs as well.

PLANNING AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The special education and general education teachers collaborate to ensure:

- *a. the student's natural participation as a regular member of the class;*
- *b. the systematic instruction of the student's IEP objectives;*
- *c. the adaptation of core curriculum and/or materials to facilitate student participation and learning.*

The success of students with intensive special needs has traditionally been the responsibility of special education staff in separate programs. Even when students have been mainstreamed, their involvement in the general education classroom has been defined by the expectations of the special education teacher. Decisions about appropriate goals and objectives and responsibility for adapting curriculum have been seen as within the role of the special educator.

In contrast, inclusive education connotes membership of not only students with special needs, but special education staff, too. The role shift in inclusive education is particularly evident in terms of how special and general educators operate. When students are seen as valued members of the school, and real members of the age-appropriate classrooms, decisions and responsibilities for the achievement of those students are within the role of both general and special educators. This collaborative teaming (Rainforth, York & Macdonald, 1992) offers the best opportunity for success, not only in a student's participation, but in their achievement.

There are three major considerations in collaboration among general education teachers and special education support staff. The primary benefit of inclusive education lies in the fact that students have access to the variety of activities, routines, celebrations, responsibilities, choices, opportunities and information available to other students. Sharing this history is critical to more fully participating in the community at-large, now and in the future. The first consideration of cooperating general and special educators is to ensure that each student is naturally involved in all these opportunities and activities. Every activity available in the general education program offers opportunities for skill development in cognitive, motor, social and communicative areas. As cooperating educators inventory these opportunities, the critical question is not can this student be included, but what degree of support is necessary for the student to participate and achieve.; what are our expectations and what assistance can be provided to ensure success?

The second consideration is to ensure that students receive the specialized instruction they need to learn within the general education activities and curriculum. Over the years, powerful instructional strategies have proven to be beneficial in assisting students with significant learning disabilities to learn. These strategies are not obsolete in inclusive settings, and although some may need to be modified for use in heterogeneous settings, they must be available to educational staff. Instructional strategies focused on analyzing activities and routines, assessing and teaching to specific learning styles and prompting and correcting are relevant in any educational setting. Through collaborative planning, parents and general and special educators share relevant information on formal and informal assessments and determine which systematic instructional strategies are advised, how they will be delivered within lessons and activities, who will use them and how they will be evaluated (Neary et al, 1992).

Finally, collaborative planning allows a vehicle for adapting curriculum. The variety of activities and depth of curriculum common in most classrooms requires time to prepare materials and strategies for students with intensive special needs so that they may obtain the greatest amount of benefit. Many adaptations are easily accomplished and can be generated by the general education teacher as a normal part of responding to the diversity of abilities within the general population. Others will require thought and special preparation. There are a number of published curriculum development approaches available which share common elements of an ecological approach (Giangreco, Cloninger & Iverson, 1993; Gee, Alwell, Graham & Goetz, 1994; Neary, Halvorsen, Kronberg & Kelly, 1992). Each stresses the necessity of developing a *student planning team* involving the student,

his/her parents, the student's close friends, and general and special education teachers to gain insight into the student's strengths and needs as well the current and future environments and activities targeted. There are a number of ways being utilized to gain this insight, including the Family Interview (Calif. Dept. of Education, 1992), MAPS (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989), and Personal Futures Planning (Mount & Zwernick, 1988). Priorities generated through this approach form the basis for examining the school and classroom routines and activities for potential opportunities and to develop a plan for support and participation. A *collaborative planning team*, which involves the general and special educator and parent as a core team, is responsible for identifying educational priorities and the activities they will be addressed within. Many collaborative teams use a matricing process to organize ideas about how educational priorities will be met throughout the day. The daily schedule for the class or a schedule of course options (secondary) are placed along one axis and the educational other needs are placed along the second axis. The team brainstorms ideas for meeting student needs through this process, establishing an initial *student participation plan*. A number of ways to adapt curriculum have been suggested (Ford & Davern, 1992; Giangreco et al 1994, Neary et al, 1992 and Udvari-Solner, 1994) including providing physical assistance or assistive devices, adapting materials, incorporating multi-level curriculum, working on alternate goals within the core curriculum, changing instructional groupings and teaching formats and providing varying levels of support. In selecting adaptations, collaborative teams select curriculum outcomes and strategies that are as close as possible to typical student outcomes, and that allow for student success.

It is critical for teams to continue to refine student participation and staff support strategies. Developing personal futures plans and educational priorities can get the student started in the general education program, however, it is likely that the program will need continual refinement and adjustment. *Transdisciplinary functional assessment processes* offer the best opportunity to identify critical skill needs in classroom, school and community activities and routines so that the student's participation improves qualitatively. Functional assessments outline the natural steps or requirements of an activity or routine, identify the current level of student performance, identify potential adaptations and targets for teaching. They also help identify the level and types of supports necessary for success.

Supplemental instructional services (e.g. communication, mobility, adapted P.E.) are provided to students in classrooms and community settings through a transdisciplinary team approach.

Because of their communicative, physical, sensory or social-emotional needs, many students with severe disabilities have a number of specialists involved in providing services. Each discipline has its own approach and each needs time with the student to assess and provide direct services. Often, these multi-disciplinary services are done in isolation from each other. There is a wealth of literature on the benefit of providing integrated therapy services to students with special needs (Campbell, 1987; Rainforth et al, 1992). This transdisciplinary approach (Rainforth et al. 1992) is promising because by definition it means coordination of services, effective and efficient use of staff and demonstration of communicative, motor, cognitive and social skills in

relevant contexts. A collaborative approach allows for service providers to conduct joint assessments, share information regarding their assessments, impressions, suggestions about goals and objectives and instructional approaches. Further, it extends beyond this, in that it begins a process of skill-sharing among service providers. They determine assessment and support schedules so that the most efficient and effective use of their time is assured. For example, speech and language services can be delivered within classroom lessons with the therapist supporting the student during Language Arts. Physical therapy services can be delivered in classroom transitions, positioning the student at tasks, or in P.E activities. When related service providers work in this fashion, modeling collaboration on a regular basis in the general education setting, general and special educators can take advantage of their specific information and expertise in order to develop their own skills in other disciplines.

Regularly scheduled collaborative planning meetings are held with general education staff, special education staff, parents and related service staff in attendance as indicated, in order to support initial and ongoing program development and monitoring.

Meeting the needs of students with special needs in inclusive settings requires that frequent and focused discussion regarding the student's progress and participation take place. The activities of the school and general education classroom are dynamic, requiring planning and preparation of materials to ensure the student will achieve the full benefit. Often, teachers in mainstreaming situations find it difficult to meet except at lunch or on the run between classes. Students with significant challenges require a more

carefully thought out approach and formalizing these planning times is critical. Regular, structured planning meetings that are effective and efficient allow special education staff the preparation time they need to best access the curriculum and other opportunities at the site and in the classroom. They allow general educators the opportunity to voice their ideas and any concerns they have about the student's progress and participation, and the provide parents with a way to participate in the learning situation and keep in touch with their child's progress.

At the elementary level, meetings involve the student's general education teacher, the special education support teacher, parents, and when necessary, related services staff or instructional assistants. Meetings are generally held at least monthly and may be more frequent initially until staff and parents are comfortable with the program. At the secondary level, the special education support teacher commonly meets with general education staff during preparation time. If cooperating general education teachers have common preparation time, the number of separate meetings is reduced. At least initially, pulling the team of cooperating general educators, the special education support teacher and parents together is important to discuss expectations, learning approaches and to resolve concerns.

One of the most difficult issues with planning meetings concerns the time for the meeting. Many sites set these meetings before school. This keeps the team on track because when it is time for students, there is no delay. It is amazing how quickly decisions are made in this time crunch. Other sites plan after school, which may allow for more leisure, but often means tired team members. Common teacher preparation time is used and allows more

flexibility in meeting during the school day. Some sites hire a substitute on one day of the month to free cooperating teachers for a period to meet with the special education inclusion teacher. Other sites use "banked" time. By agreement among staff and families, instructional days are lengthened and minimum days are established periodically to allow for preparation time. Schools that provide quality inclusive education make this planning time a priority.

Plans exist for transition of students to next classes and schools of attendance in inclusive situations.

As students prepare to transition to their next grade or school, it is critical that planning team meetings begin to address this change and that those individuals who will be working with the student, for example the next general education teacher, are part of the planning. Many school sites have established a formal process for transition planning, scheduling a series of meetings in the spring with sufficient time for a smooth transition.

Transition meetings involve the core planning meeting team-the current general education teacher, the special education inclusion teacher, the parent(s) and the next general education teacher(s). In some situations, they involve the student's friends. They focus on informing the next teacher(s) or other important staff about the student's needs and progress. They allow for parents to meet the next teacher and share their hopes and dreams for their child. They allow for team members to share the stories of success for the year and identify those things that they believe will continue the success.

They also help establish a support system for the new teachers involved. Like the collaborative planning team meetings discussed, transition planning meetings should be organized, efficient and action-oriented. Transition planning meetings identify specific activities for team members to take, for example arranging a visit to a new school or class, working out mobility or accessibility issues, meeting other students and examining curriculum for adaptation strategies. Taking the time to open communication among all involved is a wise investment of our resources and critical to supporting students in inclusive situations.

BEST PRACTICES

Effective instructional strategies (eg. cooperative learning, activity-based instruction, whole language) are supported and encouraged in the general education classroom. Classrooms promote student responsibility for learning through strategies such as student-led conferences, and student involvement in IEPs and planning meetings.

Many special educators who have been working to integrate or mainstream students with severe disabilities from the basis of a special class, have often had a limited number of opportunities. As Biklen pointed out in Achieving the Complete School: Strategies for Effective Mainstreaming (1985), one of the most common strategies for mainstreaming is the *teacher deal*. This is defined as "....administrators and the educational system do not provide support for mainstreaming or, at least in any significant way, participate in it. They may recognize it, even speak positively about it, but its life depends

upon the individual teachers who make it happen" (p.28). The special education teachers in this common situation approach teachers they feel might be amenable to integration/mainstreaming and attempt to get their student into the class. General education teachers can say yes or no. Integration then depends upon this agreement, not on what the student may need. In inclusive education, the team attempts to match student needs, classroom environment and teaching style.

There is a large body of literature on the advantages of active, hands-on learning for students with severe disabilities (c.f. Horner, Dunlap & Koegel, 1988). Learning has been shown to be more rapid, and skills are more likely to be generalized and initiated when learning situations are relevant, functional and active (Hunter, 1982; Stoll, 1991; Wang, 1992). Teachers, if they have the choice, will usually opt for the general education classrooms that provide this type of learning environment as the most likely to support success.

General educators have also recognized the benefits of cooperative structures in supporting learning (e.g. Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Slavin, 1992). Classroom populations have become increasing diverse in terms of the abilities of students who do not qualify for special education. Teachers have also recognized that the skills students need to participate and succeed in the world today go far beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. In an increasingly complex, diverse and immediate world, cooperative and collaborative skills are critical. Cooperative learning offers enormous benefits for supporting students with disabilities. It allows for students to work at their own level on a variety of skills with the support of the other group members. Research

continues to support the effectiveness of cooperative learning in terms of both acquisition and mastery for students with and without disabilities (Slavin, 1991) and for both groups of students in inclusive situations (Hunt, et al 1994).

Finally, many schools have found success in supporting student skill development through increasing their involvement in decision-making about their education and evaluating their own progress. (Ford, Davern & Schnorr, 1992; Rothman, 1990). Students with special needs also participate in "person centered planning" to determine their own goals and objectives (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989). They have worked with staff to select examples of their own work and planned for student-led conferences to share progress with families (Gistelli & Morse, 1994).

TRAINING

General ability awareness is provided to staff, students and parents at the school site through formal or informal means, on an individualized basis. This is most effective when ability awareness is incorporated within general education curriculum.

In many situations, students in general education have not had direct experience being educated with or interacting with, students with disabilities, particularly those with significant cognitive, motor, social or sensory challenges. Their teachers and parents may also have very limited personal experience with disability, because they were not educated in inclusive settings themselves. When a school is changing its approach by including

students previously excluded, students, teachers, administrators and others may need information about disability. This allows them to have a better understanding of the impact of disability and strategies to support those who have disabilities.

There are many ways to provide ability awareness at a school site. Most ability awareness workshops include experiential stations, small group opportunities for participants to see what it might be like to experience a sensory loss, cognitive difficulty, motor problem or communication barrier for a brief time. These experiences do not represent the true experience, because they are transitory and out of context, however they do stimulate conversation about the impact of a disability. The simulation experience is one very important part of these activities. Another important component is the opportunity for participants to discuss how disabilities might affect many of our life activities, including school work. Equally important, ability awareness simulations and discussions educate participants on how people adapt, accommodate and compensate.

While large scale experiential and informational approaches have been implemented in many areas, including "Disability Awareness Fairs" or "Disability Awareness Week" , many schools are incorporating information about disability within the curriculum in a more natural, relevant manner. For example, discussions about attitudes towards and treatment of, people with differences can be part of our social sciences or history curriculum. We can discuss many of the physiological bases for disability within our science or health curricula. Literature provides an enormous opportunity to discuss the flexibility and adaptability of people, as well as provide role models of people who overcome challenges daily. Much of the exciting electronic and

mechanical equipment developed for students with communication and motor challenges can also be part of our computer sciences, home economic or science curricula. Rather than develop add-on disability awareness days, or assemblies, educators have found ways to weave relevant and current information and experiences within much of the core curriculum. Some school districts have incorporated diversity in ability as part of their multi-cultural education curriculum (Davis Joint Unified School District, 1992). It should be noted that the most beneficial ability awareness approach is in how our schools, teachers, parents and students model their belief in the value of each person in the community. Talking about treating each other with respect, regardless of our abilities means little if we are not living the experience each day. Similarly, encouraging peers to interact with and be friends with students with disabilities means little if adults do not welcome and interact with and seek out these students themselves.

Adequate training/staff development is provided for all involved.

Many school districts have initiated inclusive education for individual students or groups of students without adequately addressing the training and staff development needs. These initial efforts have succeeded or failed based upon the skills of those advocating for or implementing inclusion. Often it is the special education teacher who takes on the responsibility for providing information and resources to others who are cooperating. These initial efforts are commendable, but rely on a very few people to maintain the inclusive practices and each year they must be repeated with new staff.

There is an increasing number of school districts and school sites that are taking a more formal approach to training and staff development by pulling together site and/or district level planning teams to assess the current situation in terms of factors that support and hinder inclusive education. A critical part of this effort is to design an inservice plan for staff, students and parents to ensure that those involved have the skills necessary to meet the needs of all students. The best way to ensure that an inservice training plan for inclusive education is relevant and effective is to develop the plan through a school site team involving the site administrator, general and special educators, paraprofessionals and parents. These key individuals can identify not only the most important content necessary, but also the best way to structure the inservice training. Site teams often arrange to visit other inclusive programs and may invite teams from these schools to meet with site staff to share experiences and strategies. Effective training should include awareness level presentations, skill practice workshops, follow-up sessions on application and teacher to teacher dialogue.

Inclusive education is not an add-on program at a school. It is not for one student whose parents advocate or for students who are "ready" for inclusion. With the increasing interest in inclusive education and the corresponding increase in controversy about this initiative, it is critical that we have standards defining inclusion. When we operate from a common understanding of what supports success, we can more easily establish these inclusive environments and assist those schools to work through the challenges of implementation.

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